

Sermon for Sunday 3 May 2026 – The Fifth Sunday of Easter

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Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5; 1 Peter 2.2-10; John 14.1-14

Dear Lord, reveal to us through your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit your glory in this world. Amen. Please be seated.

There are times in all our lives when we long to belong. We long to know where home is, not simply a building with walls and a roof. A place where we are known, welcomed, and loved. For some, that sense of belonging comes naturally through family or friendship. For others, it is harder to know what belonging really feels like.

As we look again at the war-torn countries in Europe and the Middle East and witness the destruction of young lives and families, it is easy for us to feel sadness, anxiety, and fear for the young. Yet sadly, this is nothing new. After the Second World War, it was increasingly recognised that people, especially young people, needed opportunity to grow, connect, and belong. Many organisations had recognised this need.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, founded in 1956 by the late Prince Philip alongside Kurt Hahn and Lord Hunt, was created to help young people develop resilience, service, teamwork, and character. Its purpose was simple, yet profound. To bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood by helping young people grow through challenge, service, skill, and adventure. On the surface, it is about endurance and practical skills, but underneath it is about something deeper: learning to trust one another, work together, care for one another and discover what it means to belong to a group, a shared purpose. In many ways, this mirrors the Christian life. We are not meant to walk alone.

As stated in the Gospel reading, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled.' But we know in today's Gospel Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. He knows they're anxious, fearful, and unsettled. Their whole lives have been reshaped by following him. They have left behind homes, livelihoods, and familiar certainties. As Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospel, as stated in Matthew, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' For years the disciples have travelled with Jesus on dusty roads, rugged hillsides, and unfamiliar places. No doubt there were times of discomfort and uncertainty, yet they felt secure because they were with him.

And now comes the shock. Jesus tells them he is going away. No wonder their hearts were troubled. So Jesus speaks, that have brought comfort to generations of Christians, these words: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. I will go to prepare a place for you.' What a remarkable promise. Jesus does not offer vague reassurance. He offers belonging. He tells his disciples that beyond all the uncertainty of this life there is a home prepared for them. Not an afterthought, not temporary accommodation, but a place already made ready by Christ himself. A home spacious enough for all, a home marked by love, peace, and welcome, a home where nobody is forgotten.

These verses are often chosen at funerals. They speak powerfully into grief because they remind us that death is not the final word. For those who trust in Christ, life is changed, not ended. Those who have grown weary, struggled greatly, or quietly borne burdens over many years are not lost. They are welcomed home. St Paul echoes this hope in Philippians: 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' And in Revelation we hear: 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more.'

Yet for many people, home can be a complicated word. Not all earthly homes are places of peace. Around the world today, homes are broken or destroyed by war, poverty, displacement, disaster, division, loneliness, or fear. And so Jesus's promises speak directly into one of the deepest longings of a human heart. At times we too may feel weary, as though we do not quite belong, standing somehow on the outside looking in. Then hear these words afresh: 'I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.' In Christ we are not homeless. Even in our most difficult times, Christ is drawing us home.

But this promise is not only about the future. In our reading from 1 Peter, we hear that God is already building something among us now. Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. Not isolated stones scattered randomly, but stones joined together into something greater: a house, a household, a people. And Peter goes further: 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.' Christian faith is deeply personal. But it is never private. We are called into a relationship not only with God but with one another. Church is not simply somewhere we attend. It is a community in which we learn what it means to live as God's people.

Here we pray together. Here we are fed by the work, word, and sacrament. Here faith is nurtured from those new to faith to those who have walked with Christ for decades. Here we begin practising the life to which we are called for eternity. If heaven is communion with God and Christ and neighbour, then the Church is where we begin learning that life now.

Alongside belonging and home, another great theme in John 14 is trust. I recently spoke with a young person preparing for his Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award who had just returned from an expedition in the Highlands of Scotland. Over several days of hiking and camping, his group had to navigate by map and compass, carry all they needed and organise everything themselves. Trusting one another became essential. Many of you will know from your own experience, walking or hiking with others, how important trust, communication and shared responsibility can be.

And still, even as Jesus reassures his disciples and us, the disciples continue to question him, and Thomas says honestly, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' It is such a human question. We want maps, certainty, directions, or even our mobile phones. But Jesus does not give up, does not give Thomas or the disciples a route map. Instead, he gives them himself. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' The Christian faith is not primarily about following a system. It is about following a person in Jesus.

Philip goes on to say, 'Show us the way then.' 'Show us the way to the Father and we will be okay, we'll be satisfied.' But then Jesus said to him, 'Have I not been with you for these last three years and you still do not know me?' And as we think, like those young people on expedition, we do not always see the full route ahead. But as we follow Christ, we are shaped into a new kind of community — welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and compassionate. A people who trust one another. A people who glorify God through Jesus. A people who make room at the table.

So perhaps the question for us today is this: Where is home? For Christians, home is not simply where we were born, where we live, or where we feel most comfortable. Home is ultimately where Christ is. And because Christ is with us now, we begin to experience that home already, in worship, in fellowship, in acts of kindness, a bread broken and shared, in lives offered in love.

Jesus says, 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, many rooms, much space, a place prepared, a welcome assured.' As we continue our journey in life, let us come to Jesus. And as we leave this place today, let us look at this beautiful and ancient church not simply as a monument to the past, but as a blueprint for the future. We are living stones being built on the one true foundation of Jesus Christ.

And we have to work, and we have work to do. As Saint Peter reminds us, we are chosen to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Our troubled world is waiting for that light, and we have the privilege of bearing it. Not by our strength, but by pointing in word and deed to the one who is the way, the truth, and the life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.